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# Agencies lock horns over security checks

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The espionage case involving charges against a former Navy warrant officer and his sailor son has brought to the surface a deep split between the Pentagon and the Office of Personnel Management over the

quality of security checks on military personnel and government contractors.

The dispute emerged last week when Joseph A. Morris, OPM's general counsel, told The Washington Times that background checks on military personnel and contractors are the "soft underbelly" of the government's security program.

Senior Pentagon officials rejected the charge Friday and tossed back a few barbs of their own.

"I'm sure Mr. Morris is a fine lawyer," said L. Britt Snider, director of counterintelligence and security policy. "But we disagree."

"Our procedures are not only as good as those followed for civilian personnel. They are better," said William R. Fedor, a senior official in DOD's office of the deputy undersecretary for defense.

The clashing viewpoints in the two federal agencies were expressed in the aftermath of last week's arrests of retired Navy Warrant Officer John Anthony Walker Jr. and his son, Seaman Michael Lance Walker, on charges of spying for the Soviet Union.

Interviews with a number of sources disclosed that the criticisms exchanged by OPM and DOD were the tip of the iceberg, reflecting deep disagreement on how to use limited resources for screening access to secrets.

OPM believes the Pentagon relies too much on interviews with people being cleared and not enough on independent sources. The Pentagon thinks OPM wastes its time interviewing stale sources and wants to impose an inefficient system on the rest of the government.

The two agencies have locked horns over the issue in several intramural forums. OPM has forced the Pentagon to apply OPM standards to

DOD civil servants, but the Pentagon stands firm on its own procedures for military personnel and civilian contractors.

There are three levels of government security clearances — "confidential," "secret" and "top secret." About 2.7 million civil servants and military personnel and 1.5 million contractor employees have security clearances, most "secret" or "top secret."

The dispute is over how the Defense Investigative Service (DIS), which is responsible for Defense Department personnel security checks, clears military personnel and government contractors for access to "secret" documents.

"We have never felt that ... what DIS does for contractor and military personnel is anywhere near adequate," said George Woloshyn, OPM's associate director for compliance and investigations.

OPM sets governmentwide security clearance standards for federal civilian personnel. It has no authority over military and contractor personnel clearances, but wants uniform standards for granting all security clearances.

"Unless you have uniformity, some agencies aren't going to honor other agencies' clearances," Mr. Woloshyn said.

He charged DIS's "secret" clearances rely too much on a procedure called the "interview-oriented background investigation," or IBI, the core of which is an in-depth interview with the person being investigated.

Mr. Woloshyn said the IBI is "an excellent investigative tool" and has been added to OPM's own clearance procedures. But he said because of cost constraints, DIS has "eliminated significantly" checks of other sources of information, "things you need to keep the subject honest." OPM typically checks about 30 sources of information — about half interviews and half record checks — as opposed to half that number by DIS, he said.

Pentagon officials rejected the criticism, saying it's not quantity but quality that counts.

"The numbers aren't meaningful," said Mr. Fedor. "The question is whether you are going to the right sources."

Tests prove the subject being investigated is often the best source even of derogatory information about himself, he said.

"People really like to talk about themselves," said Maynard C. Anderson, director of security plans and programs. "A skilled agent can elicit all kinds of information ... and leads."

DIS is concerned less with the number of persons interviewed about a subject than the quality of the information they are likely to have, he said. The agency emphasizes interviews with a person's "peers" rather than people such as school teachers or pastors who may have had only a passing relationship with a person, he said.

But Pentagon security chiefs said they would welcome more help.

"We would like more resources," said Mr. Snider. "We go in every year for more. But DIS competes just like any other defense agency ... and the fact that we want more resources and may have a good case for them doesn't mean that we are going to get them."